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Navajo Nation Council amends the Veterans Trust Fund for the construction of homes for Navajo Veterans

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the 22nd Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0193-13, amending the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust fund, 12 N.N.C. §1171.

The amendments provide for the equal distribution of the annual comprehensive budgeted amount between the Navajo Nation Veterans Affairs Trust Fund and the Department of Navajo Veteran Affairs, to construct 15 homes and to provide minor renovations and repairs for Navajo Veterans in each of the five agencies for the next four years.

“This is the final stage and I am asking for your support to implement a seed that will help foster providing homes for the veterans,” said legislation sponsor Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat). “With this legislation we are amending the laws to allow for the mechanism to take place.”

Following the sponsor’s presentation, Council Delegate LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) introduced an amendment to maximize the use of funds.

“If they are not able to spend the dollars before a fiscal year ends, those unexpended dollars will go back into the Veterans Trust Fund and we are unable to use them,” said Delegate Bates. “This amendment would allow for those [unexpended] dollars to go back into the construction of those houses.”

Delegate Shepherd added that the legislation assigns a business unit number to each of the 15 recipients to ensure accountability.

“I support this amendment because I know that if we are using nine individuals to build fifteen homes, this will help keep the funds moving on to the following year,” said Council Delegate Russell Begaye (Shiprock). “It’s going to be difficult to build these homes within the time line and we need to finish each project in a timely manner.”

The Council approved the amendment with a vote of 13-0.

Although the Council unanimously supported the amendment, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon,

Whitehorse Lake) expressed concern about the number of chapters that would be assisted in the Eastern Navajo Agency.

“If fifteen chapters get assistance and homes, that means 4 chapters won’t,” said Delegate Tsosie.

Speaking in support of the legislation, Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the current veterans housing services available through the Navajo Housing Authority are inadequate and that the legislation would help to alleviate the high need for housing across the Nation.

“We need to take a risk in order to see the benefits of veterans housing. If we sit here and ridicule the legislation we will only wish from the sidelines with our veterans,” said Delegate Hale. “I think we need to vote on this, support it, and give it a chance.”

Before the vote on the main motion, Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhi) stated, “The veterans need to be notified that this is their money, this does not belong to the central government or even the agencies. We are doing this for them.”

Council members voted to approved Legislation No. 0193-13 with a vote of 13-2.

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